UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/50/171
21 July 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fiftieth session
Item 98 of the provisional agenda*

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/174 of 21 December 1993 on the strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme. In that resolution, the Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed the central role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as the principal body to catalyse, coordinate and stimulate action in the field of the environment within the United Nations system, invited the Secretary-General to strengthen further the liaison function at Nairobi for the Commission on Sustainable Development, urged Member States to make their contributions to the Environment Fund in accordance with UNEP Governing Council decision 17/32 of 21 May 1993 and requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the conference facilities in UNEP headquarters at Nairobi were utilized to the maximum and in a cost-effective manner and to report to the Assembly at its fiftieth session on the implementation of the resolution. Progress in that regard is outlined below.

2. Since its assumption of responsibility for the liaison function of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a number of further steps have been taken by UNEP to strengthen this, on the basis of arrangements made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and taking into account the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/191 of 22 December 1992.

3. Prior to the adoption of resolution 48/174 and following the conclusion of the first substantive session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (New York, 14 to 25 June 1993), the Executive Director of UNEP offered to the

* A/50/150.

95-21902 (E) 270795 310795

/...

Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the Secretariat the services of UNEP in providing for the discharge of the liaison function. The offer was accepted and, in February 1994, following agreement on terms of reference, a staff member of UNEP was appointed on a full-time basis as Liaison Officer in Nairobi for the secretariat of the Commission, with associated logistical, travel and communications expenses being borne by UNEP. That arrangement has proved extremely useful for UNEP in playing a major role in preparing for Commission on Sustainable Development sessions, as well as for the permanent missions, non-governmental organizations and global and regional organizations headquartered at Nairobi.

4. In order to strengthen further the liaison function and to enhance its relevance to increased cooperation between UNEP and the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the liaison function has, since early 1995, been placed with the Division of Environmental Policy in UNEP. That move is expected to facilitate liaison with the Commission leading to enhanced cooperation between UNEP and the Commission, since the Division of Environmental Policy also handles inter-agency affairs within UNEP and is the principal focal point for all matters relating to the General Assembly.

5. In its decision 17/32, the Governing Council reaffirmed that UNEP would require access to adequate financial resources, particularly in accordance with chapters 33 and 38 of Agenda 21, to enable it to exercise all the functions assigned to it by Agenda 21.

6. Despite the provisions of decision 17/32, however, there has been little change in contribution patterns. Pledges and contributions for 1995 have not only fallen short of the target established by the Governing Council, but may be insufficient to finance the Fund programme of activities for the biennium 1994-1995. The problem is further compounded by late payments. Governments should make their pledges in advance of the year in which they intend to pay their contributions and do so early in the year in order for the secretariat to plan and execute the programme more effectively. Late payment leads to the need to carry over cash balances from biennium to biennium, which not only disrupts proper planning and effective implementation of the programme of work, but also provides an inaccurate portrayal of the level of resources.

7. In the same decision the Governing Council also recognized the need to broaden the base of contributions to the Environment Fund and called upon all Governments to contribute to the Environment Fund and, where they were already contributing, to increase their contributions.

8. Despite the enhanced mandate given to UNEP by Agenda 21 and the increased number of assignments given to the secretariat by the Governing Council at every succeeding session, contributions to the Environment Fund are declining in real terms. The secretariat has undertaken measures to increase productivity and effectiveness, but this anomaly can only be corrected by increased and timely contributions by Governments and by broadening the base of contributions. In order to enable UNEP to respond effectively to the challenges it faces, Governments would have to respond to their own decisions to increase their contributions to the Fund.

9. As requested in paragraph 7 of resolution 48/174, the Executive Director of UNEP has actively pursued the possibilities of holding major meetings related to the environment programme in the conference facilities at Nairobi. More meetings of the convention secretariats were held at Nairobi in 1994 than in earlier years. The Fourth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and other related meetings took place from 4 to 14 June, the second meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee on the Convention on Biological Diversity was held from 17 June to 1 July and the tenth meeting of the expanded working group on the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and related meetings followed from 4 to 8 July. Conference-servicing staff recruited on a temporary basis serviced all these meetings in sequence, thus entailing savings on travel costs for each of the three entities involved. Several other meetings under the Montreal Protocol were held at Nairobi in September and October.

10. Several meetings under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were held in November 1994 and the seventh session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa will be held at Nairobi from 7 to 18 August 1995.

11. Continuous efforts are being made to programme meetings back to back in order to maximize the opportunities for savings on conference-servicing costs. In April and May 1995, the fifteenth session of the Commission on Human Settlements was held simultaneously with the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), followed by the meeting of the Ad Hoc Expert Group of the Montreal Protocol from 8 to 12 May and the eighteenth session of the UNEP Governing Council from 15 to 26 May 1995. All these meetings were serviced to the extent possible by the same interpreters, again saving considerably on travel costs (one round-trip instead of three).

12. In addition, UNEP has made a special effort to provide remote translation services via electronic means to meetings held away from Nairobi. This has meant that UNEP no longer has to send teams of translators and typists to the venues of meetings, thereby cutting down considerably on travel costs.